

Five Themes of Geography

Location

The theme of location answers the question "Where is it?" The answer to this question can take two forms. One way to tell where something is located is called **absolute location**. This is where you tell a location using latitude and longitude. The absolute location of the Sears Tower is 41°N latitude and 87°W longitude. Sometimes we give a location without using latitude and longitude. Sometimes you tell a location using words. **Relative Location** tells where a place is located by describing what is nearby. The relative location of The Sears Tower could be described as being west of Lake Michigan.

Place

Place is like a mental picture of a place with the people going about their daily lives. Every place on Earth has its own special qualities that make it different from other places. The differences could be due to the land itself or the people who live there.

We refer to the natural qualities of the land as **physical characteristics**. Physical characteristics are things that we can describe about the land which are caused by nature not by people. This includes the climate, landforms, native plants and animals, types of soil, etc. The natural features of a place do not give us a complete picture of what the place is like though.

The people living in the area also make a place unique. The qualities of an area due to the people who live there are called **human characteristics**. Each place has a unique group of people with their own culture, religion, language, clothing, building styles, government ideas, etc. The physical characteristics of the subtropical island of Key West, Florida are very similar to the near-by island of Cuba. The human characteristics of Spanish speaking, communist Cuba are very different from English speaking, democratic Key West, Florida.

Human-Environment Interaction

Human-environment interaction (HEI) describes how people change the environment they live in and how their lives are different because of the natural characteristics of the area they live in. People impact their environment when they change the shape of the land digging with machines, when they clear a natural area for farming or to build on, as well as when they pollute. Damming a river, cutting down a forest, digging up natural resources and creating landfills all affect the environment.

The environment we live in also affects our lives in many ways. The climate of an area controls the crops that people can grow, the clothes they wear, and many daily activities. The food people eat depends on what crops and farm animals are adapted to live in the climate of the area. People also build their houses very differently depending on what the climate is like and what building materials are available in the area.

Movement

Movement studies the relationships and connections between places. The theme of movement studies how goods, people, and ideas move around the Earth. Natural resources, farm products, as well as finished **goods** are shipped from place to place on ships, trains, trucks, cars, air planes, and by animals. **People** also move around on the earth's surface. People travel and migrate from place to place. Immigration is one topic we study when we discuss movement. Movement also includes the movement of **ideas** from place to place. Ideas travel using phones, computers, TV, radio, newspapers, etc. Because of the movement of ideas we can learn about an Earthquake that happened thousands of miles away or talk to somebody in another country.

Region

To understand other places around the world we need a way to group places together. In order to understand and compare places we group areas together that have similar physical or human characteristics. We may group places because they share a landform such as a mountain range or coast line. We may group places because of the climate or biome found in the area. We also group places together based on human characteristics. We might talk about an area because of the language or religion found there. Economic activities such as manufacturing, mining, or farming can also be used to describe a region. A place can be part of many regions at once. East Dearborn is a mostly Arabic speaking Muslim region located in the region of Southeastern Michigan. We can also include Dearborn in the Midwest and Great Lakes regions.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What is the difference between Absolute and Relative Location?
2. Compare the 2 cities/states or countries with the same physical characteristics but different human characteristics.
3. How do people adjust to their environment and how do people change their environment?
4. What are the characteristics of the region you live in? Consider climate, space, economic activities and cultural aspects.